

FEEDING STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

Deepa Joseph, Jane Friedman, Marissa Krakowitch, Sheila Balasa

Research has shown that approximately 62% (range: 30–84%) of children with ASD will present with feeding difficulties, including increased food selectivity, greater likelihood of unhealthy eating habits, and associated mealtime-related behavioral problems in comparison to children with other disorders.



IS YOUR CHILD A PICKY EATER OR PROBLEM FEEDER?

Picky Eater vs. Problem Feeder

Picky Eater

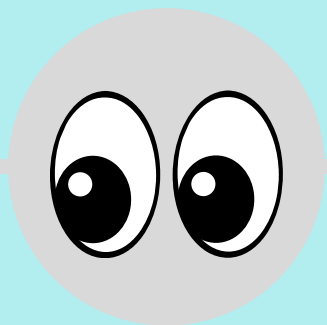
- Decreased variety of food (< 30 foods).
- Foods lost due to burn-out regained after 2 wks.
- Able to tolerate new foods on plate, touch, or taste.
- Eats at least 1 food from most food textures.
- Adds new foods to repertoire in 15-25 steps.

Problem Feeder

- Restricted range of foods (< 20 foods).
- Foods lost due to burn-out, foods not regained.
- “Falls apart” when presented new foods.
- Refuses entire categories of textures.
- Adds new foods in > 25 steps.

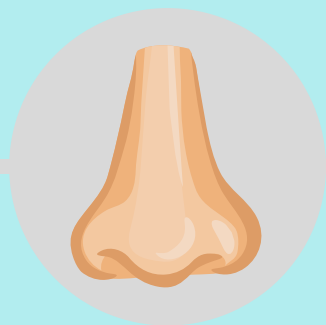
Kay Toomey, Ph.D.

Hierarchy of Sensory Exposure For Feeding Therapy



Look

Look at new food on plate



Smell

Bring new food up to nose to smell



Touch

Touch new food with finger



'Kiss'

Bring new food to lips and 'kiss'



Lick

Lick new food with tongue



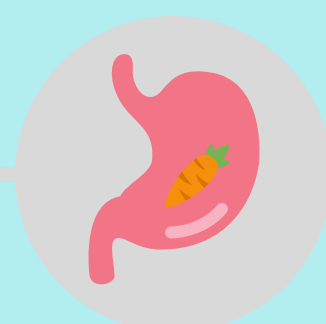
Bite

Bite new food with front teeth



Chew

Chew new food - moving it side to side



Swallow

Swallow new food all the way to belly

- Use a hierarchy to help move your child toward eating foods.
- Use rewards to motivate if needed.
- Move from tolerating food to swallowing in the same room.

BEHAVIORAL FEEDING STRATEGIES

FOOD PLAY

- Blow beans or peas across the counter!
- Build a castle out of chicken strips!
- Drive a toy car through mashed potatoes! -
- Using broccoli florets or carrot sticks as paintbrushes or stamps

FOOD CHAINING

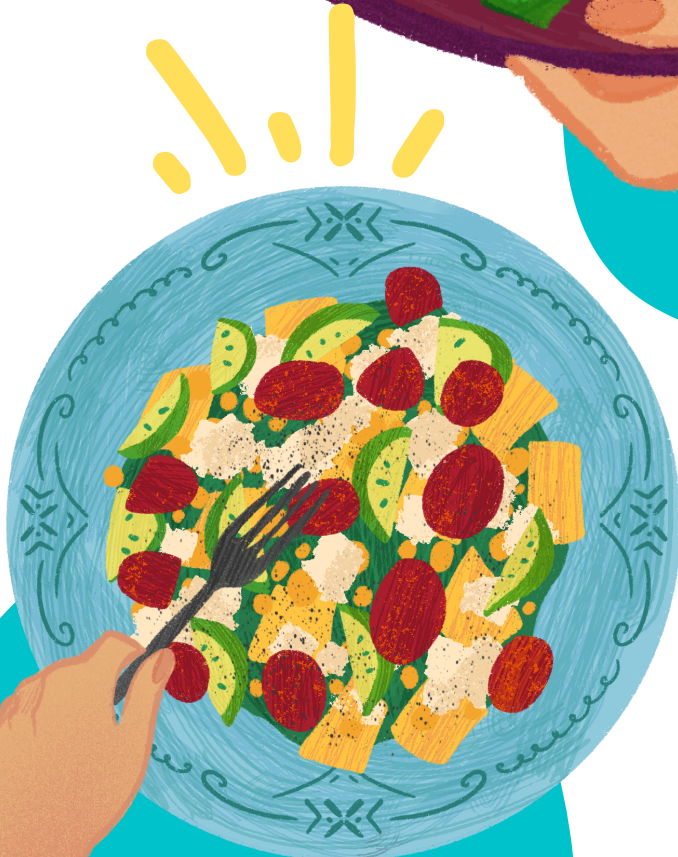
- Start with a food the child accepts
- Identify a new nutritious food that has a similar flavor or texture as the ones that are currently accepted by the child
- Make small changes in the characteristics of foods to work toward new food.

DEVELOP A HUNGER CYCLE

- Space meals and snacks 2 to 2 ½ hours apart in order to develop a hunger cycle
- Only water is offered in between
- After 30 minutes (15 minutes for snacks) remove food and the child must wait until the next meal or snack to eat again.

SMALL BITES

- Offer small bites of food
- Have your child cut up the food into the size they want to try





SIMPLE HABITS TO INCREASE SUCCESS



COOKING TOGETHER



- Encourage your child to help you cook in the kitchen
- Do not tell them to taste the foods they are preparing
- Praise any interactions with foods especially nonpreferred foods (I like how you mixed the carrots).

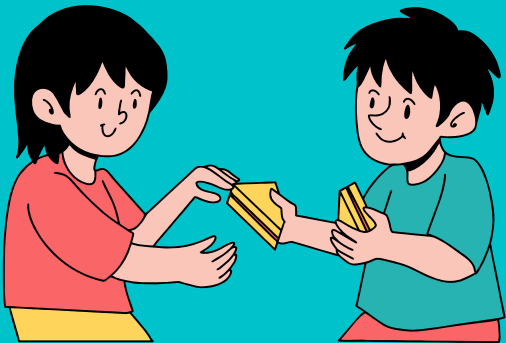


DIPPING NON-PREFERRED FOOD

- Dip preferred food in non-preferred dip
- Dip non-preferred food in preferred dip
- Let child decide how much to dip

PRESENTING NEW FOODS

- Present one new food with two preferred foods
- If child won't tolerate new food on plate place on separate plate next to child's plate
- Let child explore/tolerate the food without expectation of consumption.



USE REWARDS

- Use preferred foods, toys or videos as a reward for taking bites.
- May need to reward child using a 1 to 1 ratio.
- Older children may be able to earn points for taking bites that they can redeem for larger rewards.
- Make sure to choose a reward that is extremely motivating for the child.



SHOP FOR FOOD TOGETHER



- Let your child look at, smell and touch new foods.
- Talk about the properties of the food while you shop.
- Let them pick out a new food to take home and try.



SET THE TIMER

- Set a visual timer to help your child remain seated for meal.
- Start with 5 minutes (or 1 if needed) and increase every few days until the child sits for 20-30 minutes without getting up.





SIMPLE HABITS TO INCREASE SUCCESS



NON-REMOVAL OF SPOON



- Spoon is presented at mouth
- Food is re-presented if expelled
- Ignore problem behaviors
- Praise acceptance



MIX IN HEALTHY FOODS

- Add healthy foods into your child's preferred foods.
- Blend spinach in a monster smoothie!
- Add butternut squash to mac and cheese sauce!
- Mixing blended chickpeas to cookie dough!
- Add water to juice, soda or lemonade.
- Start with a tiny bit added in and increase if accepted.



RECIPES THAT CHILDREN LOVE



Ingredients




4 cups fruit
(strawberries,
mango, blueberries,
raspberries, or
peaches)



honey to taste



Healthy Fruit Roll-Ups

- Preheat oven to 150 – 200 degrees Fahrenheit. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper (do not use waxpaper).
- Pour fruit and honey into a blender or food processor and puree until smooth. 
- Pour fruit mixture onto parchment lined 9×13-inch pan(21cm x 31cm). If you wish to remove the berry seeds, pour it through a sieve or ring it through a cloth (much faster).
- Spread the fruit mixture with a spatula to a thin even layer.
- Bake for 6 hours, until leather peels away easily from the parchment. Set on the counter to fully cool down for 4 hours or overnight.
- Using scissors cut the parchment paper from the edges and then into strips. Roll them up, parchment and all.



Mac 'N Cheese

INGREDIENTS

- 12 oz pasta (shells or elbow)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup milk (plus more if your sauce is too thick)
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 4 oz block cream cheese
- 2 carrots, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 cup chopped cauliflower
- 1 cup frozen butternut squash
- 1 tsp salt

DIRECTIONS

1. Steam veggies for 5-7 minutes until tender. In a blender, puree $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water and steam veggies until smooth.
2. On the stove, combine pureed veggies, milk, cheddar cheese and cream cheese and simmer until smooth. Whisk if chunky.
3. Cook pasta and then pour sauce over. Use extra milk to thin if necessary or if reheating to smooth sauce.



Healthy Chocolate Pudding

INGREDIENTS

2 small ripe avocados

¼ cup (25g) unsweetened
cocoa powder

½ cup (120g) plain yogurt
(regular or Greek-style)

3-4 dates, soaked and pitted

1 teaspoon pure vanilla
extract

NOTES

Transfer to an airtight container and store in the refrigerator for up to 4 days. Give it a good stir right before enjoying.

DIRECTIONS

1. Soak dates in warm water for at least 30 minutes. Drain and be sure to remove the pits.
2. Add all the ingredients into a food processor or blender and blend until smooth, scraping down the sides as needed.
3. Taste and add more cocoa powder or dates (or other sweeteners like maple syrup or honey) as desired. Enjoy cold with toppings of choice, if desired.

Frozen Yogurt Banana Pops



INGREDIENTS

3 bananas peeled and cut
in half

3/4 cup vanilla yogurt or
flavor of your choice

sprinkles or toppings of
your choice

popsicle sticks

DIRECTIONS

1. Halve and peel each banana. Insert a popsicle stick into each banana half.
2. Dip bananas into yogurt, using a spoon to coat each banana evenly. Let excess yogurt drip off.
3. Add sprinkles or topping of your choice.
4. Place bananas on a plate covered in wax or parchment paper. Freeze until the yogurt has hardened, about 2 hours. (Allow for more time if you would like the banana to be frozen through).